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ABSTRACT

Over the past 10 years, New York has more than doubled its spending on elementary and secondary education, in a fervent attempt to produce greater student achievement and prepare our young people for the fast changing world in which they will have to earn a living. Better results have not been produced as the education system has focused on more rules and requirements, more oversight, and more bureaucracy. Seven sections compose this report. Section 1 discusses the 1980s initial reform's misconception that more schooling would achieve more learning. A surge of mandates--and of money--fueled growth in bureaucracy and special programs, but results did not improve. Section 2 reports on where the $11 billion was spent. Section 3 discusses the indifferent results in New York's schools, while section 4 explains that non-public schools, offer some lessons for the public schools in how to get good results for less money. Section 5 elaborates on what makes good schools: focus, leadership, autonomy, high standards, and an orientation toward results. Section 6 looks at examples of new, results-oriented schools in New York, and section 7 details a new Compact for Learning to give schools more autonomy to arrive at intended outcomes. (RR)

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SPECIAL REPORT

The $11 Billion Mystery

New York More Than Doubled Its Spending On The Schools During The 1980s. Why Didn't All That Money Produce Better Results?

EA 023 836

The Public Policy Institute

EA

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The $11 Billion Mystery

New York More Than Doubled Its Spending On The Schools During The 1980s. Why Didn't All That Money Produce Better Results?

The Public Policy Institute of New York State, Inc.

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February 1992

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Executive Summary

Overview. An Old Mystery; A New Agenda

Why hasn't the $11 billion we've added to the education budget in New York since 1980 produced better results? The answer: our education system has focused on more rules and requirements, more oversight and more bureaucracy. Not on results. **Page 1**

Section 1. The 1980s Reforms: Boom and Bust.

Initial school reforms were based on the misconception that if you insisted on more schooling, you'd get more learning. There was a surge of mandates — and of money. Bureaucracy grew; special programs grew. Results didn't improve. **Page 5**

Section 2. The $11 Billion.

The new money doesn't seem to have made a dent in our schools' problems. Where did it go? Besides administrative expenses, transportation programs and the like, much of the new money was eaten up by special services, or by programs for the growing number of students classified as handicapped. **Page 10**

Section 3. The Results.

The results in our schools are showing few, if any, signs of improvement — yet the kinds of skills and knowledge our young people will need in the competitive world of the future are growing more complex every day. **Page 17**

Section 4. Non-Public Schools.

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When the first wave of reform-by-regulation failed to do the job, analysts looked more closely at what makes good schools tick. Some of the answers: focus; leadership; autonomy; high standards; and an orientation towards results. **Page 26**

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Some of the best examples of how a new, results-oriented education system can do the job are working every day in New York State. **Page 33**

Section 7. A New Compact for Learning.

The state Board of Regents has gotten the message, and adopted a reform program designed to loosen the reins on local schools and set their sights on results. The key question now is: will this new approach really be implemented in practice? **Page 40**

Overview

An Old Mystery; A New Agenda

Over the past ten years, New York has more than doubled its spending on elementary and secondary education, in a fervent attempt to produce greater student achievement and prepare our young people for the fast-changing world in which they will have to earn a living.

Annual school spending in this state is now $11 billion higher than in 1980. Our spending per pupil is about 60 percent above the national average, and it is even farther above spending by international competitors such as Japan, western Germany and the United Kingdom.

Yet despite all that money — and despite the best intentions of state policymakers, and the often heroic efforts of teachers and administrators — New York's schools are not measurably better today than a decade ago. If anything, the education they are delivering has fallen even farther behind the fast pace of change in the working world which today's young people are entering.

Those who are now trying to design education reform policies that will work better than did those of the past decade must, therefore, confront this *$11 billion mystery:* Where did all that money go? Why didn't it buy better results from the schools? How can we spend our educational dollars more effectively in the future?

Those questions are not ones which the education establishment wants to hear. Its reflexive answer to calls for better school performance almost always is: **more money!**

Yet today, less than one dollar out of every two which New York taxpayers spend on education actually reaches the classroom. And the experience of the past decade proves conclusively that simply pouring more and more money into the same system will not necessarily produce better results. More money *might* help, but only if the new money — and the huge supply of existing dollars, as well — is spent

New York's Public Schools: A Decade of Spending Increases

Category	School Year 1980-81	School Year 1990-91	Change
Enrollment	2,838,393	2,547,258	- 10%
Total cost (thousands)	$9,969,092	$20,896,000	+ 110%
Per pupil cost	$3,610	$8,203	+ 127%
U.S. cost per pupil	$2,502	$5,208	+ 108%
% above U.S. per pupil average	44%	58%	+ 32%
The consumer price index (use to compare spending to inflation):			
New York City	82.1	138.5	+ 69%
Buffalo	83.5	127.7	+ 53%
U.S. average	82.4	130.7	+ 59%
Pupil-teacher ratio in New York	1:17.3	1:13.8	- 20%
... national average	1:18.7	1:17.2	- 8%
Pupil-staff ratio in New York	1:8.5	1:7	- 18%
... national average	1:9.7	1:9.2	- 6%
Avg. class size (grades 1-6) in NY	25.8	23.6	- 8%
Pupils classified as handicapped	216,342	266,791	
.. as a percentage of total	7.6%	10.5%	+ 38%
Teachers	163,837	179,682	+ 10%
Other professional staff	25,963	31,028	+ 20%
Average SAT scores			
Verbal	427	413	
Math	471	468	
U.S. avg. SAT scores			
Verbal	424	422	
Math	466	474	

more effectively, on getting educational *results*, not just on building up educational *empires*.

A large proportion of what New York taxpayers pay to support the school system goes to special services and administrative overhead — not the classroom. And cutting back the bloat has proven to be an uphill struggle. Fewer than half the people employed by New York schools are teachers — yet according to a survey published by the

New York State School Boards Association, *more* than half the school employees laid off in recent rounds of budget cuts have been teachers.

While the number of students per school employee is about seven to one, most classes still contain between 20 and 25 students, hampering the efforts of teachers to provide personal attention to their pupils.

It is increasingly clear that New York cannot *afford* to keep adding billions upon billions to prop up the existing school system. The state government wrestled with a threatened $6 billion deficit in the current fiscal year. And despite $4.1 billion in tax increases burdening its economy over the last three years, the state confronts a potential deficit of $4 billion or more in the next fiscal year. Local school districts are similarly strapped.

An outmoded system

While scores on some state achievement tests have slowly inched upwards, particularly in poorer school districts, performance on national tests by New York students has declined. More students are graduating and going to college, but college remedial courses are chock full.

The problem is not with those who work in the schools — it is in the outmoded system they keep trying to patch together and shore up. Simply ordering it from above to produce more does not — and cannot — get the job done.

The social climate, the influence of families, the economy and breadth of skills demanded by the job market have all changed significantly over the past two decades. But the education system — the way schools are organized and the methods they use to teach — has not changed in almost a century. That is why many of the reforms adopted by New York and many other states during the 1980s have borne little fruit.

In the rapidly changing world in which we are competing, the trick, as Texaco President and CEO James W. Kinnear pointed out recently, is to "aim high." Kinnear, who heads education reform efforts for The Business Council and the Business Roundtable, said "we must set high expectations for our educational process — expectations matched to the needs of the keenly competitive global economy where we work, and where our young people will work in the future."

A plan for change

Last year the Board of Regents, the state's governing body for education, adopted a new reform plan which recognizes that the key question for schools isn't more spending — it's setting clear goals and focusing resources on those goals more effectively.

"We know that we should have clear, explicit goals and high standards and expectations for all students," says Education Commissioner Thomas Sobol. "We know that we should align the curriculum with these goals and standards, and focus resources and activity on achieving these results."

The "New Compact for Learning," crafted by Sobol and approved by the Regents, promises on paper, at least, to lay those goals and expectations out, and then to give the teachers and principals in individual schools much more autonomy and responsibility in finding ways to meet them.

The premise is that, given clear goals and freed of excessive state oversight and bureaucratic impediments, the professional practitioners in the schools can find — and do — what works.

This is a premise which has already been proven in practice.

Around the country, there is a group of education reformers who in recent years have sought out schools producing excellent results and tried to figure out what they were doing right.

The answers were illuminating. They rarely had much to do with money. They had to do with leadership, commitment, high expectations, personal attention, and — most importantly — autonomy to make necessary changes.

These findings are already being used to transform the look and character of a smattering of schools across the country — wherever education professionals have been willing to risk scrapping the rulebooks and aiming for results, instead.

Taking a risk

Ironically, some of the most interesting changes and greatest improvements have come in some of the "worst" schools — places where those in charge felt they had nothing to lose by trying something different.

They shuffled around resources, classrooms and teachers into whatever form worked. They did not have more money to work with — they simply used it more effectively. It is the sort of rejuggling that cannot be done from above — only school by school.

This is not an argument for spending less on education, which remains the single best investment a community and state can make for the future. It is an argument for spending the limited resources of the 1990s more effectively.

It is an argument for results.

Section 1

The 1980s' Reforms: Boom and Bust

At the start of the 1980s, when the nation concluded that the American education system that had long been the envy of the world was in danger of being surpassed in much of the world, New York was among the first states to act.

Convinced that if you insisted on more schooling, you would get more learning, the state Board of Regents and Education Department:

- Tightened graduation requirements for students.
- Stiffened certification standards for public schools and teachers.
- Began testing students regularly for achievement.
- Ordered remedial programs for those who failed.
- Mandated a range of new courses.
- Mandated new programs for the handicapped.
- And ordered districts to document compliance.

What began as a trickle of "musts" ended in a dizzying torrent by the end of the decade. In January 1991, in an effort to get a handle on just what schools were required to do, the department compiled a listing of everything the Regents, Education Department, federal and state governments required. The list fell just short of 300 items — many imposing multiple demands.

The surge of mandates

To stiffen graduation requirements, the Regents ordered that students take an additional unit of math, science, social studies and a unit of art or music. Additionally, all students were required to have at least two foreign language courses before graduation — at least one before the ninth grade and one after.

As the decade wore on, more courses were mandated for the junior high level: home and career skills, art and music, library and information skills, introduction to technology. And, eighth graders were to be

given access to high school courses if they were ready for accelerated work.

All of this created serious scheduling problems at all but the largest schools. Some schools chose to drop many elective subjects, while others actually dropped the number of *basic* courses they offered per week to fit everything else in. Ironically, some students began receiving less classroom time in core academic subjects than before.[1]

As the population of non-English speaking students increased statewide, the Regents required that those students receive "English as a Second Language" classes or bilingual services. These requirements put New York City schools under tremendous strain, requiring special instruction for students speaking more than 100 languages other than English. It is estimated that over 3,000 teachers were hired to meet this new mandate alone.

And in line with federal guidelines and court orders, the Regents issued orders that handicapped students would have to be admitted, diagnosed and handled in the least restrictive environment possible. Comprehensive plans for the schooling of these children were required to be drawn up within 30 days of their referral for special education, and twice yearly these plans and the students' progress had to be reviewed by a full team of professionals.

Schools themselves were placed under additional scrutiny. The state's official High School Registration Guide now lists 85 compliance items. They range from submitting a guidance plan to developing a student discipline policy, to submitting an anti-discrimination plan for all school and extra-curricular activities, to seeking approval of a remedial instruction plan.

Reviews and more reviews

No subject appeared too small for the Education Department's attention — right down to requiring that schools submit a system for screening transfer students, certify that lessons in patriotism and citizenship were being worked into course curriculum, and certify that schools display a flag and recite the pledge of allegiance daily.

Meanwhile, state legislators also got into the act, seeking to extract certain guarantees in exchange for the billions of additional dollars in state aid they were asked to approve. They required schools to medically inspect all pupils; provide instruction in fire and arson prevention; and provide private school students transportation, textbooks, computer software and special education for the handicapped.

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[1] New York State Education Department, "Evaluation of the Implementation of the Regents Action Plan: Fourth Annual Report," February 1990, p. 162.

Other legislative mandates included providing elementary students weekly instruction in the humane treatment and protection of animals and birds; teaching high school students the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and drugs; and providing highway safety instruction. No fewer than 61 separate laws are on the books to guarantee some special service to handicapped students.

This past spring, the Regents voted to relax several mandates, and to permit teachers to instruct one period a day outside their area of certification. But every mandate has a constituency, and the Regents endured excruciating pressure — and vitriolic criticism — for their decisions. Action was deferred by the Legislature on a longer list of recommendations by school principals and administrators for mandate relief — actions estimated to save districts some $150 million.[2]

Convinced that education was a good investment and a key to their own children's future and that of society, taxpayers barely flinched when the bills of the 1980s began pouring in. The easy-money attitude and optimism of the decade, paired with the conviction that schools were finally being brought into line, created a generous mood among taxpayers towards schools.

Thousands more teachers, administrators and education specialists were hired, even as the number of public school pupils dropped by 10 percent over the decade. Teacher-pupil ratios dropped from 17:1 in 1980-81 to 13.8:1 in 1990-91, the fourth lowest in the nation.[3] As more non-teachers were brought on board, the staff-pupil ratio dropped from 8.5:1 to 7:1 over the decade[4]. New York now has 31 percent more school employees per pupil than the national average.

Bureaucratic overload

It has not been lost on the education bureaucracy that ever more *reviewing* provides opportunities for the employment of ever more review*ers*. A mountain of paperwork fostered by the Regents' desire to document compliance with new mandates led to the hiring of more secretaries, clerks and administrators.

The paperwork demands became so great at one point that two Long Island lawmakers, responding to complaints from local school administrators, asked the Education Department for a list of every report they required of New York schools.

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[2]Lionel Meno, March 4, 1991 report to school superintendents on Regents 1991 State Aid Proposals and Forthcoming Regulatory Changes.

[3] Ibid. It is interesting that average class size is so much larger (24 or so) than the pupil-teacher ratio; this is a consequence of the fact that so many teachers are in special programs or other functions separate from the traditional classroom setting.

[4] Compiled from enrollment and staffing statistics contained in the State Education Department's "Public School Enrollment and Staff" report for 1980-81 and 1990-91.

School Spending Comparisons: 10 Largest States

STATE	Teacher Salary (in 1,000s)			Spending Per Pupil (in 1,000s)		
	School Year 1980-81	*School Year 1990-91*	*% Incr.*	*School Year 1980-81*	*School Year 1990-91*	*% Incr.*
NEW YORK	20.4	41.6	103%	3.6	8.2	127%
Pennsylvania	17.7	35.4	100%	2.8	6.5	132%
New Jersey	18.3	38.8	112%	3.3	8.4	154%
Ohio	16.2	32.6	101%	2.3	5.2	127%
Michigan	21.1	37.6	78%	2.6	5.2	100%
Illinois	19.5	34.7	78%	2.7	5.0	85%
Florida	15.6	30.4	95%	2.3	5.0	117%
California	19.6	39.5	102%	2.4	4.8	100%
North Carolina	15.9	29.0	82%	2.0	4.6	130%
Texas	15.7	28.3	80%	2.0	4.3	115%

The department had the forms delivered to the Capitol. "It practically took a truck to deliver them," recalls one Education Department official. Since then, many of the requests have been computerized, cutting down on shipping costs and, perhaps a bit, on the amount of paperwork and duplication of requested information.

The Legislature has added to the paperwork by instituting a hodge-podge of state aid formulas — more than 50 of them. Distribution of state aid under the formulas requires districts to perform an enormous amount of record keeping to document need and compliance with requirements — and often results in spending determined not by school priority but by the availability of state aid.

A heavy cost

The cost of all these "improvements" was not cheap. New York went from spending $3,610 per pupil in 1980-81 to $8,203 in 1990-91— an increase almost double the rate of inflation.[5] That compared to a national per pupil average of $5,200, putting New York in second place for per-pupil spending nationally.

The table on the previous page provides comparisons among the 10 largest states. International comparisons suggest that even the U.S. national average, which New York exceeds by some 60 percent, is substantially above our key international competitors — 48 percent ahead of Japan, 42 percent ahead of western Germany, 36 percent ahead of the United Kingdom.[6] For their smaller budgets, those other countries get a longer school year and (apparently) better results, to boot.

New York's pro-education attitude and liberal spending patterns continued right up into the early 1990s, well after the recession that had its roots in the 1987 stock market crash had worked its way into the bowels of many New York communities. As late as the 1990-91 school year, school spending was still rising by an average of 10 percent statewide. As hard-hit businesses everywhere were laying off workers and imposing pay freezes, school boards continued to grant hefty pay hikes. In 1991, with the state in budget crisis and federal aid drying to a trickle, school boards statewide approved new contracts granting pay hikes averaging 9 percent, according to the State School Boards Association.

Only as taxpayers were asked to approve budgets for the 1991-92 school year did they begin to revolt. More than 28 percent of the school budgets submitted were voted down — higher than any rejection rate in the 1980s. The bulk of those disapproved contained increases of 9 percent or more.[7] Squeezed from all sides on money, taxpayers finally began to ask where all the money was going, and were they getting their money's worth for this costly investment?

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[5] 1980-81 figure is from the state Education Department's "Annual Educational Summary, 1981," p.2, and 1990-91 figure is an estimate published in the department's "Education Statistics Estimates, Fall 1991."

[6] *International Comparisons of Public Spending on Education*, research report of the American Federation of Teachers, Washington, D.C., Feb. 1991, p. 16. Based on 1987 figures, using OECD Purchasing Power Parities for currency conversions.

[7] New York State School Boards Association, "Association's Survey Tells Why School Budgets Pass or Fail," June 1991.

Section 2

The $11 Billion

In school year 1991-92, spending on elementary and secondary schools in New York is expected to top $21.4 billion; $8.3 billion or 38 percent of that is to come from the state, with the rest coming from local property tax collections.

Since 1980, $11 billion has been added to school spending, but it doesn't seem to have made much of a dent — the black hole seems unfillable.

So "who's got the money?" is a question much asked by taxpayers, lawmakers and citizens curious to know why schools don't seem to be making much headway, despite the investment.

A statewide breakdown of spending compiled from the 1988-89 school year appears on the following page; it provides a bare bones, if rather dry, sketch.[8] The key point is: less of the money is going to the classroom than you might hope.

Where the money goes

Fordham University Professor Bruce Cooper and Robert Sarrel, former budget chief for New York City's high school division, in 1989 tracked the $6,107 allotted per city high school student all the way through the system into the classroom.

The two concluded that $2 out of every $3 allotted per high school student was eaten up by bureaucratic and other non-classroom expenses.[9]

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[8]State Education Department, "Second Annual School District Fiscal Profile Report, 1984-85 to 1988-89 School Years," p. 43.

[9]Bruce S. Cooper and Robert Sarrel, "Managing for School Efficiency and Effectiveness: It Can Even Be Done in New York City," August 1990.

Where the School Budget Goes: Statewide Total Spending

Function	Number of personnel	% of total spending	Personnel added during the 1980s
Teacher salaries	179,682	39%	12,000 special needs 1,000 math 1,000 science 5,000 language 3,000 kindergarten
Other professional staff	31,028	7%	5,000 more guidance counselors, psychologists, nurses, administrators
Paraprofessionals	49,698	9%	18,000 teachers' aides
Support staff	101,703	13%	+4,000 clerks, secretaries -4,000 lunch workers etc.
BOCES salaries and expenses	8,839	3%	2,000 instructors
Benefits	(All personnel)	18%	
Transportation, operation and maintenance, debt service, misc.		11%	

Almost 49 percent of the per pupil allocation in the city, Cooper and Sarrell found, was held by the Board of Education for overhead expenses like transportation, management, debt service, fringe benefits, and general administration. Of the $3,138 passed on to the high school division, another 5 percent bite was taken at that level for administrative overhead. That meant $3,005 reached the high school.

But the nibbling wasn't yet complete. Another 5 percent was deducted for basic support staff like librarians, counselors, psychologists and teachers who perform non-teaching jobs. Another 8.6 percent was deducted for salaries of principals, assistant principals, clerks and secretaries, and 3.5 percent for time used by staff to supervise other staff. Thus 16.9 percent, or another $1,033 was used to administer the high school internally.

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That left $1,972 out of the original $6,107 per student for instruction — teachers' salaries and other education resources.

"Undoubtedly, some of these 'overhead' functions are essential, such as school security, transportation, and management," Sarrel and Cooper wrote. "One must question, however, whether a system must spend two dollars on 'support' to deliver one dollar to teachers and students at the chalk-face."[10]

The drain away from teaching

The consistent finding of one analyst after another is: non-teaching functions of today's schools drain off a large percentage of resources from the classroom.

Personnel figures bear this out. In 1990-91, total staff employed by public schools and school districts in New York State was 371,000. Teachers accounted for 179,682 of those positions. Other professional staff numbered 31,000. Or, for every 3.5 teachers, there was 1 person performing administrative or curricular work or pupil services.

Since staffing accounts for 80 percent of a school district's budget, the distribution of personnel is sometimes more instructive than looking at budget figures. See the table on the preceding page.

With this information in hand, the question begs to be asked, where has the $11 billion in additional spending for schools gone?

Enrollment down; staff growing

Staffing in New York schools increased roughly 41,000 during the 1980s, even while enrollments dropped by almost 300,000, to 2.5 million students.[11] The increase was accounted for largely by the addition of 16,000 teachers, 18,000 teacher's aides, 2,000 additional BOCES instructors, and 5,000 additional professional staff such as guidance counselors, psychologists, nurses, and administrators. The number of secretaries and clerks rose by about 4,000, which was offset by an equivalent drop in school lunch workers and other non-professional support staff.[12]

Thus, while enrollments dropped by 10 percent, staffing rose by 12 percent. Did that additional staff end up in classrooms to lower the teacher-pupil ratio — or did it get diverted to other purposes?

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[10]Ibid, p. 12.

[11] Staffing comparisons based on figures drawn from the state Education Department's "Public School Enrollment and Staffing" reports for 1980-81 (pp 7-8) and 1990-91 (pp 4-5).

[12] Ibid.

Virtually none of the additional staff went to lowering the size of grade school classes. At the high school level, about 1,000 additional math, 1,000 additional science and 2,000 additional foreign language teachers were hired statewide, but otherwise, the number of high school teachers also remained fairly stable. That's the reason why the average class size remains in the mid-20s today — despite the 127 percent increase in spending, the flood of new hirings, and the drop in enrollment.[13]

Indeed, if every teacher were running a regular classroom, New York could have an average class size in the range of 15. And if, say, one-half of the school system's *non-teaching* budget could be redirected to teaching, we could have a class size of 15, a 25 percent pay raise for every teacher, and an extra month on the school year.

Where the jobs are

Where did the additional instructional positions go? About 3,000 went to set up kindergarten programs where schools had none. But the remainder of new positions largely went to handling handicapped, remedial and problem students. Almost 12,000 new teachers were hired to staff the growing number of handicapped classes. Another 3,000 teachers were hired to teach "English as a Second Language" classes. The number of traditional classroom teachers appears to have dropped by about 4,000.

Outside the classroom, 1,400 more school psychologists came on board, 1,200 more school social workers, 1,100 more guidance counselors, 1,200 more school nurses, 1,700 other non-teaching personnel and 600 more assistant principals.[14] Thus, a large chunk of the increased spending was caused by an expansion in the mission of schools during the 1980s — from simply teaching the 3Rs to handling a multitude of emotional, social, behavioral and health problems of students.

Another hefty chunk, represented by the rapid expansion of remedial and handicapped programs, was keyed to the fact that districts could get more state and federal aid by designing programs for special populations of students.

Given the number of additional problems presented at the schoolhouse door today — and state mandates to establish programs to deal with many of those problems — it's difficult to second-guess the choices made in those districts. But it's also easy to see why bottom-line performance has improved little in so many districts — and why the kind of individual attention required to teach students how to reason remains an elusive goal.

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[13]State Education Department, "Public School Professional Personnel Report, 1980-81," pp 4-5; "Public School Professional Personnel Report, 1990-91," pp 4-5.

[14]Ibid.

The overwhelming share of the $11 billion, of course, went not into new hires, but simply to pay those already on board more money. Since 1980-81, pay levels for teachers, administrators and others in the schools have more than doubled, even while the cost of living rose less only about 50 percent statewide over the decade. In 1990-91, the statewide average pay for a teacher was almost $42,000, third highest in the nation; the average principal's salary was about $64,000; and the average guidance counselor's salary was $50,000.[15]

Given the critical role of teachers in building our society's future, no one can begrudge them these pay raises. As teacher salaries become more competitive, however, it becomes more necessary to the society to ask for — and get — better performance and accountability from the schools.

Special programs

One of the fastest growing budget items during the 1980s was special education for handicapped children, and any attempts to control school spending will have to deal with this explosive issue. Almost one student out of every nine in New York public schools is classified as handicapped, emotionally, physically and/or mentally.

That portion of the school population is steadily increasing — in part because of real increases in such problems as maternal drug abuse, but perhaps also, some critics suspect, because as more and more special monies become available for these kinds of programs, school authorities find more and more ways to classify students as "handicapped." "Tens of thousands of students with no identifiable physical or neurological defects" have been assigned, perhaps permanently, to "special education," the *New York Times* reports, often because they "simply need counseling and smaller classes"; many simply lag behind in reading or are behavior problems.[16]

Each of these students, under laws developed since 1975, must have a personalized education program that must be updated yearly. Despite concerns among many educators over the effects of stigmatizing these students and lowering their own expectations, roughly one-half of them are handled in special classes all day long; about one-third spend part-time in regular classes, part-time in special groups; and the rest are turned over to BOCES for special educational programs.

While per pupil spending in New York State averages just over $8,000, the cost of educating a handicapped child in New York averages close

[15] State Education Department, "Public School Professional Personnel Report, 1990-91," p. 7.

[16] Joseph Berger, "New York Special Education: Aiding Some With Little Need," *New York Times*, April 30, 1991, B1.

to $16,000. That's because classes for such students must be considerably smaller than the norm, and special busing arrangements must be made. There are other costs, as well: $240 million a year for tests and screening alone; $300,000 a year for plaintiffs' lawyers in a longstanding court case involving compliance with federal laws; and so on.

Of all the added costs which schools face, this is the one mentioned most often as a potential time bomb, due in part to the increasing dislocations in families and the number of children born to drug and alcohol-addicted mothers in urban areas.

Those office expenses

A state Senate study released in 1991 showed that administrative expenses statewide grew three times faster than the rate of inflation in the five years preceding the 1988-89 school year. Because enrollments dropped during that period, per pupil expenditures for administrative expenses actually rose 70 percent.[17]

That study argued that a disproportionate share of state aid increases had gone to hire more administrators in wealthy districts and to pay them high salaries. It found 820 administrators on Long Island earning more than $70,000, for example, compared to 803 in the entire rest of the state.

While New York City's massive Board of Education has been extensively critiqued for its 5,000-plus employees handing down edicts from headquarters, per pupil administrative costs for the city remain below those of most other sections of the state due to the large student body in the city. It should be noted that New York City Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez has cut about 1,500 people from the 5,000 since taking office.

That, however, still leaves intact administrative offices in each of the city's 32 school districts. Those typically have at least 20 employees of their own, including a budget director; business manager; directors for special education, math, reading, language arts, early childhood programs, gifted students, etc. And to assure compliance with the myriad of federal, state and city regulations, most districts in the city have a director of compliance and a director of funded programs. This is not unlike the staffing of many medium to large school district offices across the state.

Some administrative overhead costs can be directly traced to the 1980 reforms: as the demand for accountability increased in Albany, the number of administrative personnel in school districts mushroomed. One rural superintendent estimated she spent 80 percent of her time completing paperwork for the state.

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[17] Report prepared for Sens. Galiber, Halperin, Perry, "Is This Any Way To Run A School System?" April 16, 1991, p. 11.

One frequent suggestion for trimming administrative costs is for a number of smaller districts to merge, thus eliminating duplicative services like superintendents, purchasing managers, curriculum developers, etc.

There has long been public resistance to this idea; local governance of schools, with locally elected school boards, is a cherished tradition in this state. However, local *governance* of school districts need not necessarily mean that all *administration* has to be local. Voters may want to insist that they keep electing their local school board, empowered to hire and fire the principal at their local school; but that doesn't necessarily mean that they want each school district to have to employ its own purchasing manager or its own meal planner.

A reasonable approach might be for contiguous districts to share services for such things as bookkeeping, overseeing health programs, or contracting construction, or transportation — taking advantage of economies of scale while still retaining hands-on accountability. The state could encourage such a trend by incorporating into its aid formulas more incentives for school districts to reduce the share of their budgets devoted to non-classroom expenses.

Differences in spending

Before leaving our discussion of costs, one more thing should be noted: the amount spent per pupil within New York State varies far more than the average amount spent per pupil state by state. Even leaving out aberrant examples such as the school district on Fire Island in Suffolk County, which spends over $30,000 per pupil, spending differences of two-to-one are common between poor and well-off school districts in New York State.

Poor districts face a handicap which the best efforts in the world cannot entirely overcome. The state's highest priority in school aid, therefore, should be to ensure that there is enough funding to provide a good education in the less fortunate communities that do not have the tax base or wealth to impose higher taxes.

Section 3

The Results

If spending money on schools is considered one of the best investments a society can make, then New York State ought to have a level of performance that is the envy of the world.

The results, alas, are disappointing. For all the attention and resources invested, there have been few changes in the traditional measurements of outcome.

While national Scholastic Aptitude Test scores inched upward in math and fell in verbal during the 1980s, New York scores on both tests showed a steady decline, placing New York in the middle of the pack among states that administer the SAT. (New York did have a higher percentage of students taking the SAT, which might tend to depress the state's overall ranking in any one year.)

While there are those who argue that the SATs are no measure of what has been learned, since they are designed to determine which students will succeed in college, they do measure such skills as reading comprehension, ability to reason and to apply knowledge to a given set of circumstances — all skills that will become increasingly important in job markets of the 1990s.

When the federal government released the first state-by-state results of a national math exam in the spring of 1991, New York students ranked 20th out of 37 states that administered it. The test was to measure eighth grade math skills: almost half the New Yorkers tested scored at or below fifth grade proficiency. Even the highest-scoring states had no reason to gloat — only a handful of students demonstrated eighth grade skills, leading Education Secretary Lamar Alexander to warn, "This is an alarm bell that should ring all night."

Some good news

On tests administered just within New York State to measure progress on mandated curriculums, the results are a bit more encouraging. Since 1985-86, an increasing number of elementary students taking statewide Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) tests in reading, writing and math have scored above a statewide reference point.

It should be noted, however, that these tests simply identify students who are failing and need remedial help — they do not attempt to track which elementary and middle schools are producing superior results. Schools can fail students just as surely at the high end of the scale as the low end.

The number of students taking and passing exams for a Regents diploma have inched up slightly, as have the number of students continuing on to college. However, the percentage of students passing the Regents Competency Tests, required for high school graduation, has dropped in virtually all subjects.

Happily, some of the biggest gains have come in the poorest urban neighborhoods with the highest minority concentrations. But the average level of performance in those schools remains well below statewide norms. For example, the number of New York City sixth graders who scored above a statewide reference point rose from 64 percent to 80 percent in the past five school years; the statewide average is 91 percent. The number of New York City students reading at or above grade level likewise has edged up, to 50.6 percent for grades 3-10 in 1991. Of course, that still leaves almost half reading below grade level. And the state's "grade level" standards aren't nearly as tough as they need to be to deal with the increasing demands of global competition.

Until more national achievement tests can be devised that will permit states to compare their performances, there are three national programs that allow New York to test how it is doing at the top end of the academic scale: the Advanced Placement Program, National Merit Scholarship Program, and Westinghouse Science Talent Search. In these comparisons, New York fares well.

What this means is that the highest achievers in New York are more than holding their own in national comparisons, while the lowest achievers tend to scrape the bottom of the national achievement barrel, lowering overall state showings.

It has been argued that New York actually has two education systems: one for New York City and one for the rest of the state, and that the former is the one failing, while the latter is succeeding pretty well. The argument has some validity in that students in upstate schools typically score more than 20 percent higher than city schools on Regents Competency tests, PEP and PET tests, and twice as many pass Regents Comprehensive Exams as their New York City counterparts.

However, given the socioeconomic status of most public school students in the city — more than half are at or below poverty level — plus the substantially higher number of handicapped and foreign-speaking students, plus the higher costs of doing business in New York City and the more limited resources devoted to education, one could argue that schools outside the city should be doing even better.

For example, three out of ten students in small upstate cities cannot show the minimal competence in math or global studies needed to graduate. Only four out of ten, on average, qualify for a Regents diploma, even though twice as many say in eighth grade that is their goal.[18]

A moving target

Even if some recent test score trends in New York are somewhat encouraging, that is hardly grounds for complacency.

Because as everyone from Education Commissioner Sobol on down acknowledges, the demands which students will face in the real world of the future are changing and growing more challenging every day, while the standards against which we now test are remaining static. In effect, the whole assessment process needs to be continuously revised to keep its aim on an ever-moving target.

The target is moving for two related reasons. One is the growing complexity of the kinds of jobs — and the kind of society — which today's students will face after they graduate. The other is international competition. American workers now, and in the future, will find the kind of high-skilled, high-paying work they want, and the kind of prosperity and security they deserve, only if they are educated to standards which are at least as high as those in competing countries. Yet international comparisons of educational outcomes suggest that American students — even the best — are falling behind those in other advanced countries, and even those in emerging competitors such as Korea.

Hardly inspiring

In the categories where New York has pumped a lot of additional money to resolve targeted problems, the results are hardly inspiring. Despite the expenditure of millions of dollars in dropout prevention programs, for example, the rate has remained relatively stable over the past two decades statewide. New York City, which spent more than $120 million over four years to prevent 150,000 at-risk students from dropping out, found in 1990 that most participants did not improve their attendance or academic work. In 1991, the city's 30-plus percent dropout rate improved marginally.

[18] State Education Department, "Statewide Profile of the Educational System, 1989-90," pp. 75, 77 and 133.

Every year, the number of students requiring remedial assistance grows, as do the budgets for compensatory education. Roughly one in every four public school students is enrolled in a remedial program.[19] And despite millions spent for bilingual and English as a Second Language programs, the percentage of students who pass alternative language editions of the Regents Competency Tests hovers around 40 percent.[20]

In the handicapped programs, where enormous sums have been invested in the past decade, it is difficult to track performance because most students are not given individualized tests, if any. Of the 10 percent deemed capable of competing with students who are classified in conventional ways, fewer than one-third pass the 6th grade PEP tests for reading and less than half pass 6th grade math tests. Less than 5 percent of those in special education classes take the Regents Competency tests required to receive a regular degree.[21]

In a 1991 report to the Governor and Legislature, the Regents concluded, "It is clear, from the data presented here, that we cannot be satisfied with the status of New York's schools."

Clear, indeed.

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[19] State Education Department, "Statewide Profile of the Educational System," p. 36.

[20] State Education Department, "Statewide Profile of the Education System, 1989-90," p. 79.

[21] State Education Department, "Statewide Profile of the Educational System," 1989-90, p. 98.

Section 4

Non-Public Schools

Those surveying the unimpressive results posted by New York public schools cannot help but notice that students in New York's private schools and parochial schools outperform their public school counterparts in almost all achievement areas measured.

This observation has given rise to an almost hysterical debate, in which extremists tend to argue that this proves there is no hope for the public schools — or, alternatively, that praise for private schools is all part of a plot to destroy the public school system.

Lost in this maelstrom is an essential truth: that private and parochial schools do at least some things well, and that those who would save the public school system can learn some meaningful lessons from that.

Improved performance

The improved performance of private and parochial schools is not confined, as one might expect, to exclusive prep schools like, say, Dalton, where tuition can run up to $12,600 yearly. The performance differences are equally evident at much poorer private and parochial schools — schools that spend one-third to one-half of what their public school counterparts spend per pupil.

With only a couple of exceptions, private and parochial schools post average scores on PEP, PET and Regents competency exams that exceed those of public schools by up to 10 percentage points. Although fewer private schools offer the full range of Regents courses and exams, in those that do, the percentage of students enrolled who pass the exams is strikingly higher — sometimes by as much as 50 percent.[22]

Attendance rates are higher at private and parochial schools, as are graduation rates and the percentage of graduates attending college.

[22] State Education Department, "Statewide Profile of the Educational System," pp. 63-94.

The greatest differences in performance can be seen in the New York metropolitan area, where the Roman Catholic Archdiocese runs 140 inner city schools. Despite an 85 percent average minority enrollment in those Archdiocese schools, and despite a 93 percent poverty level among students, 99 percent graduate and 85 percent go on to college.[23]

For New York City public schools, the graduation figures are significantly lower: an estimated 70 percent.[24] Of those graduates, the number who go on to a four-year college is 54.2 percent; the number for a two-year college is 22.1 percent.[25]

The difference in the price of those results is eye-popping: The average per pupil cost in the public school system for 1990-91 in the city was $7,150. In the Archdiocese schools, the cost was $2,050 per pupil. These contrasts are not significantly different upstate.

Doing more with less?

As a result, parochial schools around the country have become the darlings of the education reform set; some advocate giving students vouchers and allowing them to use them at either a public, private or parochial school. Because of competition, they argue, these schools have done more with less.

Catholic educators give several reasons for the vast differences in operating costs. For one, their central administrative offices are pared to the bone: the Archdiocese superintendent's office in New York City has just over 20 people. Compare that to a city Board of Education staff of almost 200 times that number for approximately 10 times the number of students.

Of course, the parochial schools have fewer mandates to meet and considerably less documenting of spending to tie up personnel. Which is, in fact, one of the lessons here: bureaucracy costs money and doesn't help performance.

Within the parochial schools, there is typically a principal and a secretary in the main office. They have very few specialists, and their lunch and busing programs are funded by the state. Teacher salaries are about one-third lower in parochial schools, largely because the Archdiocese teachers are not unionized and do not need the certification required of public school teachers. About 10 percent of the Archdiocese teachers are nuns or priests.

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[23] Partnership for Quality Education, General Information brochure, 3-15-91. p. 1

[24] *New York Times*, "Dropout Rate in New York Shows Decline," 6-13-91, p. B1.

[25] Ibid, p. 252.

Parents are also asked to serve as volunteers in the schools, providing services at little or no cost, and student work programs allow students to defray tuition expenses while providing valuable services like cleaning and painting at bargain rates.

A disputed model

Public school educators fume at the parochial school model, claiming that Catholic schools can pre-select their student bodies to weed out troublemakers, dismal students, non-English-speaking immigrants and the handicapped — all of whom substantially boost per pupil rates in the public schools.

And even though the poverty and minority composition of Archdiocese schools is high, these educators argue, the students have all been guided by a concerned parent or mentor into the specialized schooling. This indicates a much higher level of home support — which is a key component in all learning, they argue.

Results of some test scores, such as the math tests taken for the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also show that the performance differences between public and parochial schools are not as great as some believe. (And they show that for *both* public and parochial sectors, math performance is severely wanting.)[26]

These are valid points, and may explain away some of the price and performance differences. (Although no one has dared to ask how much better parochial schools might perform, if they could apply their approach *and* have access to the vastly greater levels of spending provided for the public schools.)

Reformers who have studied both types of systems say there is more behind the superior performance of the parochial schools, than an allegedly "better" student body.

Some insights

These analysts cite the parochial schools' attention to the basics, as opposed to a myriad of electives offered in many public schools. Discipline is a key component, as are the teaching of ethics and morals. There is a sense of school unity, of common purpose usually lacking in a public school. Very often, teachers get to know every student and the school becomes family. The rules are clear and students can count on them being enforced, so there is a sense of stability and order.

What they don't do is equally instructive: they provide no bilingual education, despite an exceptionally high proportion of Hispanic students. Students learn their English in regular classrooms. And they

[26] Albert Shanker, "Do Private Schools Outperform Public Schools?", *American Teacher*, Fall 1991, pp 8-14.

don't teach down to the lowest common denominator: slow learners are often separated from fast learners and they learn at different paces.[27]

The Rand Corp. looked at a number of parochial high schools in New York City for its pathbreaking 1990 study, "High Schools with Character." It concluded that the Catholic school mission, its staff, no-frills curriculum, strict discipline and attention to each student were responsible for the better performance, irrespective of costs.

"The rules on paper are strict: cutting classes is punished by detention; being out of uniform results in demerits; talking back to a teacher leads to a serious reprimand; and fighting, cheating or stealing is grounds for expulsion. But disciplinary action is infrequent. Except for minor infractions, students tend to obey the rules," the study reports.

Anecdotal evidence, at least, suggests that public schools have a far harder time enforcing discipline, in part because of layers of oversight imposed by courts and others. Some principals have been quoted as saying that they spend 80 percent of their time on disciplinary matters.

Because there is so little central administration, the parochial schools are almost entirely free to run their own show. Where remedial work is needed, students are required to attend a summer session and take remedial-track courses during their first two years. More importantly, each school is able to pass on the notion of its particular specialness — giving a common sense of mission to students and staff alike — and of the uniqueness of each student.

On the downside, the no-frills curriculum of Catholic schools and the paucity of resources does tend to result in reliance on standard teaching practices, with the teacher as lecturer and students spending more time memorizing and less time discussing or participating in "hands-on learning."

Lessons, not debating points

Instead of debating about the "threat" which parochial schools pose to the public-school system, those concerned about the public schools might do better to pay attention to the lessons they can learn from them. Such lessons as:

- No, educating poor, minority, inner-city kids is *not* a hopeless task. It can be done.
- Yes, it *is* important to have parents and students who are involved enough to have chosen to go to a particular school. So

[27] Abigail Thernstrom, "Out-Classed: Why Parochial Schools Beat Public Ones," *The New Republic*, May 13, 1991, p. 14.

that means that parental choice — even if confined to a choice among *public* schools — can help.

- Discipline is very important. So is a sense of common goals and common commitment; of common values.
- Direct parental involvement in the schools is also important, and should be encouraged at every opportunity.
- Getting the basics right is more important than offering an endless array of educational options.
- Small size can work to a school's advantage.
- Bureaucracy is the enemy of school performance, for two reasons. First, it drains away financial and other resources which could go to the classroom. Second, it saps the initiative and creativity of the hands-on professionals in the schools, by tying them up in red tape, procedures, reports, forms and oversight.

Section 5

The New Debate

The 1980s' education reforms set the stage for an education revolution in the 1990s in America.

First, they proved that imposing more top-down demands and strictures on schools doesn't work — and can be harmful. Trying to get better performance by defining very narrow gates within which schools must operate has produced only more mediocrity — and which often diverted resources from teaching to complying with vast lists of procedures, and to chasing dollars instead of results.

Second, they disproved the notion that money is the key solution to the problem. While common sense might suggest that the more spent per child, the better the results, that is not necessarily the case.

Money doesn't fix it

Eric Hanushek, chairman of the department of economics at the University of Rochester, reviewed the findings of 187 education studies conducted over the past two decades and concluded they showed that "variations in school expenditures are not systematically related to variations in student performance."

"...School reform discussions that begin with the premise that constraints on expenditures are the most serious roadblock to improve student performance are, at best, misguided. Expenditure increases, if undertaken within the current institutional structure, are likely to be dissipated on reduced class sizes or indiscriminate raises in teacher salaries, with a result that growth in costs will almost surely exceed growth in student performance," he added.[28]

Such conclusions prompted a whole cadre of educators to begin asking new questions and thinking about the learning process in a new way.

[28] Eric A. Hanushek, "The Impact of Differential Expenditures on School Performance," American Legislative Exchange Council, Washington, D.C. March 1990.

A number of pilot programs have sprung up across the country testing new theories of how classrooms should look and how students learn best. Many of these reformers now believe further tinkering with the system we have now will only delay the inevitable — an overhaul of public education from the ground up.

The second wave

The business community actively entered the fray after becoming increasingly dismayed over the products of the school system and finding itself spending more and more to teach employees what they should have learned before graduation. During the 1980s, a number of businesses pumped money and expertise into individual schools or school districts in an effort to help prepare graduates for the work world. Many of those who got involved concluded in the end that more systemic change was needed.

A second wave of reformers gradually emerged, including educators James Coleman at the University of Chicago and Theodore Sizer of Brown University, psychiatrist James Comer of Yale, political scientists John Chubb and Terry Moe of the Brookings Institute, and a score of teachers and administrators like Anthony Alvarado, former New York City schools chancellor.

They turned the debate around — from "what do we need to force schools to do to make them good?" to "where are the good schools and what makes them effective?" Coleman showed that while family and native intelligence were the most important determinants — something society could little control — school organization was also a key factor. And school organization is a factor that is controllable, can be changed.

Autonomy counts

For their influential book, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, Chubb and Moe studied student performance at 500 public and private schools, interviewing 10,000 teachers, principals and administrators, and 10,000 students. They found that most of the items educators had long argued for turned out to make little difference — things like levels of teacher certification, level of teacher pay, graduation requirements, amount of homework, the number of electives available or level of equipment and facilities.

What *did* make a difference? The most important ingredient, they found, was the aptitude of the child. But the second most important ingredient they named was organization of the school. Their findings closely correlated with those of Sizer, who in the late 1980s launched the Coalition for Effective Schools based on nine key ingredients.

The first and most important determinant of whether a school will succeed or not is freedom to act, or autonomy.

Other key factors that reappear on everyone's list:

- A strong principal, providing strong leadership.
- A clear sense of purpose or mission.
- High expectations for all students.
- High parental and teacher involvement.
- Class and school (or sub-unit) size small enough to make personal attention possible.
- Adherence to the basics.

"The more control the principals and teachers have over curriculum, instruction, discipline and — most important — hiring and firing, the more likely they are to develop into a coherent, effecting teaching team," Chubb wrote.

"....Unfortunately, the history of school reform in this country has been to take authority out of the schools. As a result, schools perform poorly. Further reform of that sort will not turn our schools around. More regulation is not the answer. Autonomy is," Chubb wrote.[29]

A need for focus

A group of researchers for the Rand Corp. contributed the notion that good schools always have a "focus," be it religion, science, dramatic arts or Black heritage. The Rand researchers looked at a score of public and private high schools in New York City and concluded that the ones that were working best all gave students, teachers and parents a common purpose, or focus, and were successful at instilling discipline and ethics in their students. These schools included the parochial schools and a handful of special focus schools created within the city school system in the last decade.

The schools that performed the worst — typically the large zoned public high schools — had no common goal that united the student body and staff and typically diffused their efforts in too many non-academic programs, they reported. Just as important, they had little control over their student body.

Pointing to higher graduation rates and better test scores at the focus schools they surveyed, the Rand team recommended transforming more public schools into focus schools, particularly in inner city areas where the contrast between results is most dramatic.

[29] John E. Chubb, The Brookings Institution, "Education Reform: Will It Work?"; "Undereducated Uncompetitive USA," Union Carbide Corp. report on education; 1989.

But the Rand researchers warned that to accomplish this, a few things are necessary:

- State and local agencies and boards overseeing education, and the teachers' unions, must be willing to relax their rules governing these schools to allow them to run themselves locally.
- Those who propose to start such a school must be able to select faculty and staff based on their acceptance of the school's guiding principles.
- Focus schools can only be built from the ground up; they will not work if an attempt is made to superimpose them on existing schools.[30]

The idea of a focus school is city cousin to the model offered by Sizer, based on the finding of a five-year study of American high schools sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Independent Schools. The study identified five common principles for good schools and Sizer added another four. Almost 100 schools across the country have now adopted those principles — 21 of them within New York State.

Building one by one

Sizer argues that good schools must be built one by one, not mass-produced according to a formula handed down from above by a state education department or city school board. "The heart of fine education is the constructive confrontation of able teachers and willing pupils — a joining that cannot be mass-produced," the coalition's prospectus states. "It emerges from deft and sensible adaptation, school by school, even classroom by classroom, and from a commitment to learning that best flourishes when students and teachers feel a strong sense of ownership of their particular school."[31]

Coalition schools must place personalized learning high on their agenda; teaching and other professionals are expected to know their students. To accomplish this, Sizer recommends no teacher be expected to deal with more than 80 students per semester. Smaller classes also give teachers more opportunity to draw out students through a give-and-take process. Students are seen as workers, teachers as coaches. There is no dispensing of wisdom from above; it is understood that the learning process requires the active engagement of students. "Get the relationship of the youngster with the teacher right and subject matter and all else eventually will fall into place," Sizer says.

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[30] Paul Hill, Gail Foster, Tamar Gendler, "High Schools with Character," *Rand Report*, August 1990, p. 74.

[31] "Prospectus," Coalition of Essential Schools, Brown University, p. 1.

Other principles for the Coalition of Essential Schools:

- The focus should be on getting students to use their minds well, not on offering the most comprehensive range of courses. Each student should be expected to master a limited number of skills and areas of knowledge.
- The goals should apply to all students, while the method of arriving there should be personalized. Graduation should take place when students have demonstrated mastery of agreed-upon skills, thus rendering obsolete traditional systems of age grading or awarding of credits by time spent in class.
- Staff should expect to perform multiple duties as teachers, counselors, and managers — and should display a sense of commitment to the entire school, not just their department or union.

Reducing class size

The notion that class size must be significantly reduced to personalize education and allow active engagement of students is the engine behind a successful pilot program in Minneapolis proposed and partially funded by General Mills. Based on a conviction that students will behave better and learn more if there are significantly fewer students in a classroom, the Public School Academy restricted class size to 14 students per teacher.

The ongoing program, involving two classes each of kindergarten through sixth grade, produced significant improvements in student achievement and behavior, according to follow-up audits by the city school system. Teachers said they had never worked as hard, nor been as challenged.

The idea was spawned by General Mills' director of government relations and civic affairs, Larry Sawyer. Sawyer argued that much of the spending increases in the past decade in schools had gone to peripheral support programs and special instruction for the handicapped, without much direct effect on educational outcomes. The money, he argued, had to be redirected toward the basic goal of learning — particularly at a time of fiscal constraints.

What the Academy did was "trade in" salaries it was allotted as a public school for specialists like guidance counselors, social workers, school nurses and special education teachers; that made it possible to hire more classroom teachers. Class sizes dropped to 14 — a level educational experts say is required to achieve real hands-on learning. A phone was then placed on every teacher's desk, to permit him or her to phone parents of students in the class — or to take phone calls from them. And teachers were given a hand in making decisions for the whole school.

While there were some reports of continued classroom disruptions, they were the exception, not the rule. Reading comprehension and math computation improved substantially in all grades. And the handicapped children thus "mainstreamed" performed as well or better on standardized tests as their counterparts in special classes.

The success of the project helped propel a Minneapolis referendum approving the hiring of 500 new teachers to lower class sizes. However, Sawyer argues if the city school system had the political muscle to convert many of its non-teaching professional slots to teaching jobs, no additions would have been necessary.

The issue of politics

Which raises the issue of politics in the school system. Much of the education debate over the past 20 years has centered around adult issues — not student issues. It is no coincidence that teachers, administrators, school boards, librarians and local governments all have lobbyists in Albany and at home, pushing their causes.

Chubb and Moe contend that under democratic/bureaucratic control, the system will always favor the well-organized over the many, and thus divert attention and resources from what really counts. Their solution is to give up on the existing system of centrally controlled public schools, and put our dollars in independent institutions among which parents would be free to choose.

Results, not process

In all these reform models, the focus has shifted from the process of education (number of minutes per class, teacher certification requirements, number of credits to graduate) to results. The trend clearly has shifted away from centralized control to site-based management. Every reorganization plan offered in recent years also has called for a strong push to get parents involved as partners in the educational process, in the notion that the schools have students only 11 percent of their time, while parents control how they spend their other waking hours.

A lot of old rules are being broken with abandon, with the eye on results. Businesses, once suspect as having their own hidden agendas, have been welcomed by many districts not only to help fund pilot programs but to offer instructors, create job-training programs, help design courses, and provide tutors and mentors for troubled youths.

Parents who never got their diplomas are being taught in classrooms adjacent to their children several days a week, in the belief that this will encourage them to read to their children and that if they have a better experience with the school system than the first time around, they will pass on positive, rather than negative, views of the value of an education.

Some schools are now requiring not only that parents appear at school to receive their child's report card, but that both parent and child sign a pledge at the start of the year that they accept certain responsibilities and agree to be active participants in the learning process.

In most cases, the programs working the best are those that have sprung up home-grown and are operating with the benign tolerance of traditional school hierarchies. Many grew out of districts seeking to offer public school choices to their students. There is a strong urge to pick a few successful models and institutionalize them statewide or even nationwide, to jump start the process of change everywhere. But virtually everyone involved in education today agrees that approach will only produce further failure and frustration.

Each school and community must find its own formula, based on its own values and purposes. Achieving that will require a lot more effort and commitment within each community than before — and a lot more from each parent and student.

Section 6

New Yorkers Lead

The educational ferment bubbling across the country has been led, in significant part, by New Yorkers. Dozens of schools and entire school systems are experimenting with new approaches to old problems — and finding ways to make existing resources go farther. Some of the most innovative programs are being spawned in New York City; many city schools have little to lose and everything to gain. They operate with the encouragement of Chancellor Joseph Fernandez and despite the highly political nature of local school boards there.

Arguably the most successful experiment was launched more than a decade ago by Anthony Alvarado, then superintendent of District 4 in East Harlem, which had the lowest reading scores in the city and an abysmal attendance record.

After giving students the choice of attending any school in the district, Alvarado issued an open invitation to his teachers: If you have a great idea, work it out, come to me and I'll give the okay to do it. Within a few years, the 20 schools in the district were reorganized to contain 52 separate institutions. By 1991, the district ranked second in reading scores and attendance had risen to 90 percent.

One of the first teachers in District 4 to approach Alvarado was Deborah Meier, who proposed a revolutionary elementary school with classes organized by abilities, not grades, classes taught by teams of teachers, smaller classes that integrated all remedial and handicapped pupils, and teachers making major decisions about how the school should be run.

A model for change

That school, Central Park East, has become a model for how schools of the 1990s should be run. It was so successful, and its students showed such great performance and behavior strides, that she was asked to start two more elementary schools and a secondary school.

Following the stricture, "less is more," the high school combines all teaching into two core courses: humanities and math-science. All

subjects are folded into those two areas by teams of teachers — typically two per day — although planning is done by a larger number. Lecture-style classes are rare; students typically work individually or on group projects, coached by teachers.

Spanish is taught first thing in the morning, to satisfy the Regents' language requirement. Students graduate when they have mastered a set of skills — not when they have amassed the requisite number of credits. Each teacher serves as advisor for 15-18 students, who gather every day for 30 minutes and who remain together as a group for at least two years.

Meier stretched her money by seeking out foundation funds to launch her programs. But otherwise, she spends no more per pupil than any other school in the city. Her advice: focus the money on training teachers and keeping classes small, so every child can get individual attention and the school can develop a sense of community. This aim is also achieved by keeping the schools open after hours so children have a quiet and safe place to do their homework and do not have to return to empty apartments. A school-family coordinator tries to sort out family problems that lead to problems in school.

Other alternatives

New York City is also home to 25 "alternative" high schools for students who have given up on school — or who feel traditional schools have given up on them. The rolls of these schools are filled largely with "at risk" students or those who have already dropped out from other schools. The aim is to make education relevant to their disordered lives — enough to encourage them to finish school and earn a diploma or a high school equivalency degree.

The teachers, under a waiver from the state Department of Education, often teach in areas in which they have no academic specialty — but they can get through to students where others have not. Students are rated not on traditional tests but by work portfolios. Information is passed on not lecture-style but through seminars, discussions, community visits, independent study with a mentor teacher, or work-study programs. All students must pass the Regents Competency Exams to graduate. And graduation rates from the alternative high schools are competitive with other public high schools.

One of the keys is individual attention: teachers and administrators know the students well; each student has a faculty counselor. In classrooms, the student-teacher ratio is 20:1, about one-third smaller than other high schools in the city. That is accomplished by "trading in" the schools' allotments for such professionals as assistant principals, guidance counselors, secretaries, for teachers who perform a variety of functions.

Most alternative high schools operate under a "family group" program in which students take four classes as well as a "group guidance"

period to help students overcome a variety of attitude and social problems. Parents are sometimes invited to group sessions. Students stay with the same group and teacher for four years, making them come to feel like family.

A couple of years ago, the city instituted a policy that any student suspended from a traditional school for carrying a weapon or for assaulting anyone was sent to an alternative high school.[32] More than 200 students ended up there as a result, but not one of those has been suspended or expelled since. The overall policy is to send teachers into places, not schools. Hence, teachers are sent into drug rehab clinics, welfare hotels, relocation centers for the homeless, etc. to teach the three Rs.

Literacy classes might run the entire morning or afternoon. They look a bit like a one-room schoolhouse, with kids of all ages, since they are grouped by reading levels, according to Steven Phillips, director of the alternative high schools. A team of five teachers might be responsible for 150 youngsters, deciding on a weekly basis how students will be divided up and how the core subjects will be team taught. There are no course syllabi — teachers are free to choose the best method they can find to transmit the information.

The 'mini-school' movement

Elsewhere in New York City, a crop of mini-schools is springing up, tucked at the end of corridors or in basements of larger schools — wherever a couple spare classrooms can be found. Many of these have some kind of theme or focus — and most were started by a group of dedicated teachers and parents who wanted an alternative to the local zoned school.

These schools virtually enroll their own students, talking parents and youngsters into switching over from a traditional setting. Often, the core group must show it has signed up enough students before getting approval. Typically, the schools are small, although a couple range well beyond 1,000 students. None have any more resources than the typical zoned school, but most produce better results, higher attendance, more engaged students, fewer behavioral problems. Some examples:

- Junior High School 80 in the Bronx, with five mini-schools serving 350 of their 1,300 students. Students and parents must commit themselves to the curricular and attendance standards of the mini school. Teachers are selected from the faculty of the larger junior high and must agree to "forget the contract" to do things like attend extra staff meetings, provide individual tutoring and guidance sessions and perform team teaching. Test scores have

[32] According to the Children's Defense Fund, every day 135,000 children in the United States bring a gun to school.

increased and attendance is more than 90 percent. One mini-school provides intensive work in reading, math and attendance; another specializes in at-risk students with behavior or attendance problems and prepares students for health careers while teaching them the basics.

- PS 41 in Brooklyn, with 1,000 kindergarten through sixth graders, was a pioneer in school-based management. It has ungraded classes and students progress at their own rate, working with a team of teachers. At least 30 parents work on a daily basis in the classrooms and parents have their own room in the school. Teachers are regularly critiqued by their peers to improve their techniques.

Schools in the workplace

In an effort to get more parents involved in their children's educations, Chancellor Fernandez has invited businesses across the city to provide space and amenities for an elementary school within their workplace. The plan, known as "satellite learning centers," would duplicate three schools he established while superintendent of schools in Miami: one in an insurance firm, one in the city airport and one in a community college.

Fernandez has argued that bringing schools into the workplace could be used as a perk by businesses to attract better candidates and to boost attendance and punctuality. Meanwhile, it would free space in the city's overcrowded schools and promote more economic and racial integration than currently exists in most public schools.

Such workplace schools would cost no more money: federal, state and city funding would follow students to the new schools. The city would provide teachers and books, business leaders would be asked to provide and furnish the classrooms, maintenance, heat and electricity, and after-day care.

Magnet schools

Upstate, some of the most innovative and effective ideas have evolved in magnet schools created to address racial imbalances. Those schools had to be good enough to attract white students back to the public schools. So districts really had to think about what would make a good school. Magnet schools typically are given more money per student to make themselves attractive. But money alone does not do the trick.

At the best of these schools — ones for which parents have been willing to stand in line all night to register their children — the message is inescapable: *we care.* Freed from the normal strictures, teachers and administrators forged some excellent schools. Those that relied simply on bigger facilities, newer equipment to attract students failed in their mission.

Buffalo and Yonkers, both under desegregation orders, set up magnet schools to teach the Montessori method. This method, which shuns traditional textbooks and lectures by teachers, works by letting children learn by doing, at their own pace. Students move freely around the classroom, playing with special educational materials as they feel ready for them. The teacher's role is to guide the children into the next learning experience.

Stressing self-esteem

Montessori is a popular approach that is known for developing independent thinking and self-esteem in children. Demand for the programs is high, with Buffalo reporting a sizeable waiting list for its 580-student elementary school.

To get the program off the ground in Buffalo, the school district and state had to agree to mothball some of their regulatory zeal, allowing the school to trade in standard textbook funds for special Montessori materials. Some curriculum and testing requirements also had to be waived: children are placed in multiple age groups and the curriculum is integrated so that they learn to read by working through science and social studies materials, for example. With Montessori's emphasis on self-directed learning, students progress at different paces and therefore might fall short of expectations for their grade level in one year.

Test results for Montessori children are mixed. In Buffalo, no attempt has been made to track children of the Bennett Park Montessori School to see how they performed once they reached high school. But Program Director Eileen Buermann said the school often receives glowing accounts from teachers who have their students in later grades. The same amount of funding is provided for each Montessori student as regular students in the system.

Rochester experiment

An expensive experiment has been underway in Rochester for the last four years. The city's school system instituted a career path for teachers and boosted average teacher salaries to $45,774 in 1989-90, a 40 percent increase over three years. Salaries for master teachers — those with the most experience, who are expected to teach some of the more difficult classes and work with more junior teachers to improve their performance — went all the way up to $70,000.

In return, Rochester was supposed to get more flexibility in assigning teachers, and teachers were to take on more responsibilities in running their schools and deciding what and how to teach. Further, they were to make visits to their students' homes to make contact with parents and draw them into the school.

The early results are not what promoters of the Rochester plan had hoped. Test scores and high school dropout rates have held steady,

many teachers have failed to attend meetings of school-based planning teams, and others have refused to visit students' homes because of dangerous neighborhoods. Some parents and community leaders feel they were sold a bill of goods. But Adam Urbanski, president of the teachers' union, warned from the start it would take several years for improvements to become visible.

Urbanski argues that changing the system from the inside out — to one with students actively engaging in learning, rather than teachers dispensing knowledge — requires a sea-change in thinking that cannot take place overnight. While the world and the urban environment have changed substantially over the past 40 years, he says, "the educational system, including the teachers, has failed to change." The biggest reason, he says, is that teachers and the public are suspicious of any school that doesn't resemble the one they attended. Money, he concedes, is not the problem — stodgy thinking is.

Trying to recreate an entire school system at once is also a problem. Where changes have worked best, they have been instituted school by school — with staffs heavily involved. In Rochester's case, the school administration and teachers' union leaders decided on the changes from above. In such a case, individual teachers feel a less personal stake in the outcome.

Some reform advocates in Rochester now believe it might have been better to plant a seed in one or two receptive schools first, to provide evidence the changes they sought would work and to overcome problems — then to offer incentives for more schools to follow suit.

Parental involvement

Virtually all educators say a main component of getting students to do better, work harder, is to get their parents involved in the process. In wealthier districts, this is less of a problem. But in urban areas, students often only have one parent at home — and that parent sometimes has bitter memories from his or her own school days. Getting parents like that involved — or at least less hostile to the system — is a major challenge today.

The Community Schools Program, an initiative of Martin C. Barell, outgoing chancellor of the Board of Regents, offers one solution. It provides funds to keep elementary schools open after school ends, effectively turning them into community centers. Rather than send children home to an empty home, the program gives them a place to study or take part in extracurricular classes. Additionally, students and parents can take advantage of a range of community services.

Schools in the program are open from early morning to late evening at least six days a week all year long. After classes end, the schools offer remedial classes, adult education, supplemental classes, social services and health and dental care. To date, the program is underway

only in a couple dozen schools statewide. Parents who have made use of the program — many to learn English or earn their general equivalency degree — report feeling more comfortable with the learning process and more like partners in their children's education.

In a similar vein, urban reformers say many school problems are linked to home problems and that school performance will only improve once those home problems have been resolved. This argument, championed by Yale University psychiatrist James Comer, holds that if schools pay attention to all the influences on a child, most problems can be solved before they get out of hand.

Most schools, however, do not have the resources to deal with many problems thus uncovered — and when they do, they often are duplicating the job of some social service agency. Schools already are taxing their resources to provide parallel services to many in the larger community. It has been suggested that collaboration between the schools and community agencies would work to the benefit and savings of both.

Working with the at-risk

The Cortland City Schools are now involved in a youth-at-risk program that relies on cooperation between the schools and the county Social Services department. The aim is to recognize potential dropouts early on, so that adequate resources can be marshalled quickly to resolve what often is a family-related problem that shows up in poor performance in school.

Since the Social Services-school partnership began, there has been a significant decrease in the number of youths placed in foster care homes; problems tend to get ironed out before they erupt in court. Further, the Social Services department saved an estimated $370,000 in 1990 in incarceration costs. Report cards of youths helped under the program have improved and behavior showed marked progress.

These are just a smattering of the dozens of ideas for improving schools now in motion across the state. The community schools program is a cost add-on. But, as Cortland found out, the cost of such preventive programs can reduce the costs of business as usual in other areas. In general, the new ideas are being accomplished with no significant additional costs — just rejuggling priorities and deciding where spending funds is most important.

These instances seem to prove that even in embattled schools, where there is a will, there is a way. Where teachers, parents and principals are given rein to devise classrooms and schools in the best way for their populations, they can produce better results.

Section 7

A New Compact for Learning

After almost a decade of trying to tell the schools how to get themselves into shape, the state Board of Regents has concluded that maybe there is a better way.

So in March of 1991, they approved a plan to prepare the state's schools for the challenges of the 21st Century. This "New Compact for Learning" could become the educational version of the Magna Carta, if its principles are faithfully carried out over the next decade.

The basic idea is simple:

- The Regents, as overseers of the state's educational system, will name the results they expect schools to produce.
- But they will free individual schools to arrive at those results in ways that work best for them.

The aim is to get schools and districts to focus on *results*, not simply on compliance with rules and regulations dealing with *process*. ***Results, not process.***

When you take away the rulebook, districts and schools will have to make their own rules and fashion a school according to what is best for their community.

The Compact, in effect, is supposed to free schools to rebuild themselves from the ground up without concern over being called down by "someone from Albany." It removes a big excuse for not running a school system that works. "The existing system tends to reward those who make no waves. The times demand a system which rewards those who take risks to produce results," the Regents said in the Compact.

The New Compact for Learning

KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE COMPACT	POTENTIAL IMPACT IN PRACTICE
1. **All children can learn.**	Like the "no defects are acceptable" principle in manufacturers' quality programs. Intended to keep the schools from writing off, or bypassing, those who have some difficulty learning. **No excuses accepted.**
2. **Focus on results.**	The state will stop judging schools by how well they follow established procedures. Instead, the focus will be on whether schools produce the *results* desired — that is, on what students need to know and be able to do when they graduate. The state is undertaking a detailed analysis of the specific "outcomes" needed for success in entry-level jobs and/or higher education.
3. **Aim for mastery.**	There has been too much emphasis on merely meeting "minimum" standards — and not enough on the high level of learning needed to compete in the modern world.
4. **Provide the means.**	The state must ensure that all children get the resources necessary for a sound educational outcome. The emphasis should *not* be on "equality of input" — that is, on spending the same amount per pupil. Instead, the state must seek to achieve "equity of outcomes" — ensuring whatever resources are needed to meet the needs of individual students.
5. **Provide authority with accountability.**	Once the state starts being much more demanding and specific about the *outcomes* it wants from the educational system, it should be much less detailed about the *process* schools are supposed to follow. Individual school districts, buildings and teachers are to be given more responsibility to plan their curriculum and other operational issues to meet the desired outcomes. And their progress toward the desired outcomes should be measured and reported, using new assessment tools that go well beyond current standardized testing.
6. **Reward success and remedy failure.**	Commissioner Sobol says that if the current system rewards *anybody*, it is "those who make no waves." Instead, the system must be reoriented to reward "those who take risks to produce results." Incentives could include financial ones. Another important technique for doing this would be the adoption of parental choice of public school, within and between school districts; the Compact "embraces," but does not require, choice.

Besides "getting out of the kitchen," the Regents pledged to be clear and consistent about the educational results expected, and promised to work towards consolidating state aid funds to give districts more flexibility in programming. Because state tests now largely determine what is taught in many grades, the Regents pledged to revamp the PEP and PET tests to include not just factual recall but measurement of problem-solving skills and the ability to analyze and synthesize. State assessments also will include a portfolio of the pupil's best work and an evaluation of the pupil's accomplishments. Testing will be consolidated into grades 4, 8 and 12.

To protect students in failing schools, the Regents are seeking permission from the Legislature to permit the commissioner to take over any local school to put in place a corrective plan, appoint a deputy to temporarily run the school, and, in the worst cases, close a school for reorganization and reassign its pupils.

Rather than serve as policemen over individual schools and districts, the Compact proposes to turn the state Education Department into a resource center for districts seeking professional help in certain areas — such as curriculum planning, research on cost-effective educational programs, help in developing long-term goals for a district, staff development programs, assessment plans.

An important element in the Compact is its declaration that the success of our schools does not simply depend on the schools or the state or local school boards. The compact very clearly lays out the responsibility of several other groups — all of which must be involved or improved results will not be possible. Those groups include the student, the parent, the community, higher education, libraries and other cultural institutions, and the business and labor establishments. The narrow notion that schools alone are responsible for teaching kids what they need to know — and that education is their business only — is laid to rest.

The slow pace of change

The one disappointment stemming from the Compact is that its lofty rhetoric has not always been followed up on. Nearly 300 mandates remain in place, and schools still must seek waivers to sidestep them. Any such request will require filing a detailed plan with the Education Department.

Six months after the Compact was adopted, the Coalition for Essential Schools was still negotiating with the state to drop a number of mandates that fly in the face of what the 21 coalition schools in New York are trying to do. Of more than 1,000 suggestions solicited from school districts on how to give them mandate relief, the Regents have adopted only a handful.

The linchpin of the new system is supposed to be a set of new, higher "outcomes expectations" from the Regents telling the schools the things which students are supposed to know and be able to do. But those outcomes are not expected to be fully defined and in place before 1994.

The Regents have named an assessment council to advise the Education Department in drawing up new desired learning outcomes, and have appointed committees to revamp state exams in English and math. But assessments in other areas are on the back burner — and the full program is not expected to be in place statewide until the mid-1990s.

The Regents could jumpstart the Compact by widely publicizing the dropping of dozens of state mandates and calling on parents and taxpayers to demand a consequent rearrangement of priorities at the local level.

A wakeup call

The 1980s served as a wake-up call to the nation that our schools were producing mediocre results, at best, and that this country could no longer afford to accept mediocrity — that the long coast of supremacy in education and business was over and we were now behind the pack in many ways.

They also taught us that reform can't simply be mandated or imposed from above. The job of those at the top of the system is to set clear goals, and facilitate change. Real, bottom-up reform involves redesigning schools one by one, community by community, across the country. It means spending less, not more, on bureaucracy and overhead — cutting back the restraints which a huge bureaucratic structure now imposes on the system, and freeing up resources to be used in the classroom.

Three years ago, Diane Ravitch, a teacher and longtime education reform activist who now serves as Deputy Secretary for Education, put it this way:

> *"Breaking the grip of the bureaucratic machine, without destroying the educational process for which it is guardian, will be the greatest challenge faced by those who lead the schools in the remaining years of the 20th Century."*

It is time that New York State took up that challenge in earnest.

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